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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION & DEVLOPMENT

JYOTI SHANKAR SINGH, Executive Coordinator of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), discusses the final preparations for the Conference and a wide range of population and related issues. There is an increasing demand on modern family planning services in developing countries. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) encourages different types of family planning methods. The Conference will examine matters of gender equality and the empowerment of women with its implications for social and economic development. It will also address issues of health, education and family planning as human rights issues. Mr. Singh says that UNFPA advocates sex education for teenagers in the context of protecting them from sexually transmitted diseases, and he believes that with successful family planning and economic and social development strategies the world population will not exceed 10 billion people by the year 2050.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

By the end of the century, the world population will exceed 6 billion people with an increase of almost 1 billion in this decade alone. Most of this population increase is in developing countries. As the population increases, so do our demands upon our environment. What's required is a sustainable balance between human numbers and needs and the resources of our planet. To address these issues, the world community has decided to convene an International Conference on Population and Development, or ICPD, in Cairo in September this year.

Our guest today, Jyoti Shankar Singh, is the Executive Coordinator of ICPD. Joining me to speak with Mr. Singh are Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International and Pat Orvis of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Mr. Singh, welcome to World Chronicle.

Mr. Singh, just the other day the former Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Halfdan Mahler, who is now the Secretary-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, said that WHO had been slow to deal with problems of reproduction because of the opposition of a number of countries, as he put it, "led by the Vatican". We know that the Roman Catholic Church still has a particular position on the question of so-called unnatural birth control. Is opposition still considerable to Planned Parenthood and curbing the population explosion?

SINGH: Well, I think we have to look at it on two different levels. At the level of practical action, I think one can say today that in most countries, including most developing countries, there is not a real problem in providing family planning information and services to the people, including countries which have Catholic majorities. The problem there is not so much of any opposition at the local level to provision of services, but to actual lack of services. That's what we need to extend, that's what we need to expand. But people want these services, and whatever their religious beliefs, our current assessment is that there is a demand, an increasing demand for these services all over the world, including almost all of the developing countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: But is the --

SINGH: But, if I may just conclude this part of my thinking, on the second level, which is a continuing debate at the level of international fora and international meetings and other meetings, yes, there is a continuing debate among those who want to provide these services to all those who need them and those who think that they should be limited or not provided at all. And that's the area that you are referring to.

LITTLEJOHNS: But is the UN Population Fund able to promote birth control in heavily Catholic countries?

SINGH: Yes, of course. Practically all of Latin America is in a great majority Catholic, and there are family planning programmes and services in all of them. In Asia, the only major country which is Catholic is the Philippines. And with the change of administration there, the new government is very much in favour of providing family planning information services to the majority of the population living even in the rural areas. And that's an area they have sought international assistance for, both from UNFPA and from a number of bilaterals. So in developing countries, including all countries with a Catholic majority, the answer is yes.

But there are Catholics who do not necessarily want to accept a variety of means of contraception, and if they don't want to use it, natural family planning methods should also be available to them. We are not against any particular method. What we are saying is let the people have the information on the variety of methods, and then let them have the choice of whatever method they particularly want. And if they choose natural family planning, so be it.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about other religions, Mr. Singh? The Muslim, the Buddhist, are they cooperative with the Population Fund?

SINGH: My understanding of Islam, as I have been told by a number of scholars and by leaders of Islamic countries, is that there is no Islamic opposition to family planning as such. They accept family planning. There are reservations on sterilization in some countries, and of course many of them are opposed to abortion. But they are not opposed to introduction or to acceptance of modern family planning methods. And you have examples: Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country, and it has been very successful in introducing a family planning programme, and, in fact, in reducing the fertility rate in the country. Egypt has had a family planning programme for many years, and now it seems, for the last three or four years, that the contraceptive prevalence is increasing in that country. Tunisia is another Muslim country. This is not to say that all Muslim countries will have the same approach, but the majority of them seem to be moving in that direction, and certainly at the theoretical level there doesn't seem to be any opposition. Buddhists have not shown any opposition to family planning anywhere that I know of. And the same applies to Hindus and some other religious groups.

NGUYEN: Mr. Singh, the Vatican has also launched one of its strongest attacks against the meeting preparing the draft final document. The Vatican says that the document lacks strong ethical vision to guide the programmes in the future. I wonder how the UN can address this problem without really alienating all the religious groups.

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SINGH: Well, we certainly don't want to alienate any religious group, because we want to make sure that the policies and programmes that we support are acceptable to as large a variety of people and institutions as possible. And even here, at the preparatory committee, the attempt would be to try to see where there is a meeting of minds and where we can define a commonality of concerns. And from what I know of the discussion that took place between the Holy Father and Dr. Sadik, the Secretary-General of the Conference, on a number of features, there seemed to be no dissension at all, on either side. But of course, on some questions, there is a clearcut divergence of views. And our position will be that whatever the consensus and agreement that's reached, what's at the prepcom and then at the Conference in Cairo is what we'll follow. But hopefully, by the time we reach that, as many elements of dissension and controversy as possible will have been taken care of. But eventually you have to move forward and you have to find a point where you have to reach an agreement or a decision. And I hope that's what will happen on many of these issues at this preparatory committee.

NGUYEN: Do you think the preparatory committee should soften a little bit the issue of abortion as a means of family planning programme?

SINGH: Well, first of all, the document isn't proposing abortion as a method of family planning. There is nowhere in the document any reference to abortion as a method of family planning. It recognizes abortion as a major health concern, it recognizes the problem of illegal abortions taking place in countries where the law does not allow it, and it suggests that somehow, as a health concern, that issue ought to be dealt with. Secondly, it's not for us now in the secretariat to say what should or should not be done. I hope that the delegations will ultimately reach some consensus on how they want to go forward.

But I want to repeat this point again, that the document does not propose abortion as a method of family planning. It recognizes the reality of abortion occurring in various parts of the world and suggests that it be dealt with as a major health concern.

ORVIS: Mr. Singh, this is the Year of the Family, and in September there's this massive I think decade conference which you're coordinating, and then next September, in 1995, a major women's summit in Beijing: there seems to be some kind of overlapping here. How do these -- what good do they do, these conferences and these years, and -- ?

SINGH: Well, I think that the conferences that the UN is organizing are interrelated, and we are trying to make sure that there is a link between the two you mention. In addition, there is a Social Development Summit that occurs in between, in March of next year. And we see a link among all of these three. And the secretariats of

these three conferences have met together, most recently last week, to try to see how inputs from one could be fed into the other.

ORVIS: So they do complement each other. They don't just --

SINGH: Oh, yes. It's our view that they do complement each other. This Conference will deal with not just the narrow vision of population, but a broader vision of what should be done in the social sector, and that should therefore feed into the Social Development Summit. A lot of emphasis here is going to be placed on the role and status of women, and that is a great concern to the Beijing conference. So these three events have of course a commonality of interest in given areas. And I hope, and certainly the organizers of other meetings also hope, that they will all relate to each other.

ORVIS: Perhaps to give a specific example, next year also happens be the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, in 1995. Could I ask you, what in your view is the single most important thing the United Nations has learned about population in those fifty years? I realize your agency hasn't -- is celebrating its 25th, half that long.

SINGH: Yeah, we haven't been around that long.

ORVIS: You haven't been around that long, but I'm sure you know very well what everybody's thinking and doing about population.

SINGH: Well, I think what we have learned in 25 years of operation is that there are a certain number of things that work. If you take the example of a number of countries which have only in the last 20 or 22 years succeeded in reaching a number of goals and objectives in their population programmes, then it's clear that the same kind of experience could be repeated elsewhere, outside the examples in Asia of a country like Thailand, which in a period of 20 or 22 years has managed to achieve a number of results which would have been inconceivable 20 years ago.

Indonesia is moving in that direction very rapidly. You have early examples of Korea, Sri Lanka, even some parts of India. In Latin America, you have examples: Colombia, Cuba, and now Mexico, moving in that direction. In Africa, of course, in sub-Saharan Africa, the movement has begun, but the results will take some time.

But what has been achieved already by countries which do not necessarily have as yet the same standard of living as developed countries -- and many of them are in fact poor, with no great prospect for reaching the level of developed countries in the near future -- [they] have managed to succeed, in the social sector in general and in the population sector in particular, in a way that can be replicated elsewhere. So there are reasons for optimism, and we hope that that example will be taken up in future by other countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Singh, the UN and your agency in particular have spent a great deal of effort and time and money in addressing this problem, yet we are still told that there's a possibility that the world population could explode to as much as 12.8 billion by 2050. Why is it that these efforts have not been more successful?

SINGH: I think that, first of all, they've been successful to the extent that the projected growth is not larger than what we are being told today. So there has been already a cutback in the projections in that sense. But it's clear that, first of all, not all countries have necessarily begun to provide the kinds of programmes and services that are needed by people. And I'm talking not just of family planning information services, but other services that are needed for the ordinary people to have a decent standard of living. Because all of those things are interrelated: education, improvements in the role and status of women, availability of family planning information services are all related. One cannot move without the others also following.

So if one could make an attempt at all at those levels, I think that the growth rates will fall further. But that has not happened yet, and that's why we had to have this projection. But the one that you are quoting is the high level projection. Our hope is that we may in fact be able to reach, if these programs are intensified, that we may be able to reach the lower level projection, and if not, certainly a level below medium projection. At that point, that could be a difference of more than 2 billion people.

LITTLEJOHNS: What is the low level projection?

SINGH: Well, I think it's about -- you're talking the year 2050. It should be lower than 10 billion. It could be even lower, as low as 8.5.

LITTLEJOHNS: Almost twice what it is now.

SINGH: Yeah.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Jyoti Shankar Singh, Executive Coordinator of the International Conference on Population and Development.

NGUYEN: The draft final document also proposes a lot of recommendations for government to help migrants and the refugee programmes around the world. I wonder how governments receive those recommendations while they are trying to close doors to migrants and refugees.

SINGH: Well, international migration is a very interesting and also a very tricky area. It's very difficult for the international community to devise and establish a set of rules and procedures that aren't necessarily accepted by all governments because they consider migration to be very much a subject for internal legislation. But I found the discussion at one of the preparatory meetings for this Conference, the regional conference in Europe, particularly encouraging because there, at least in the discussions

that took place there and the recommendations that were formulated, there was an understanding of the need to be fair and equitable in the treatment of the migrants who are coming from outside, mostly from developing countries. And that is put in the document of the European conference, and I think it's reflected in the draft final document of the Conference.

But on examining the basic causes which lead to outward migration, of course the solutions are not so easy. Obviously, if the conditions of living could be improved in the developing countries, that would, in the views of many, slow down the process of outward migration. But improvements in the standard of living require not only action in the population field, but in a lot of other fields, including employment.

NGUYEN: Migration, is that decreasing or increasing?

SINGH: Overall, I think that in fact in the last two years it may have slightly decreased over what it was before. But on the other hand, migration in terms of numbers to some of the European countries may have slightly increased. But if you take the overall figure of huge numbers of migrants moving from one African country to another or one Asian country to another, the numbers have somewhat declined. But the international debate is not focusing so much on those large numbers but on what happens in terms of numbers of people going from developing countries to countries in Europe or to other developed countries. And there probably the numbers have increased somewhat.

NGUYEN: Now, the undocumented number of migrants, are they also increasing? The fact that the economies in the developing world are not going that well?

SINGH: That's a matter of guess. Your guess is as good as mine. But I don't think that one can say that all developing countries are not doing that well. They're not doing well in Africa, but they are beginning to do well in many Latin American countries, and they are doing certainly well in many Asian countries.

ORVIS: Yes. Many of these so-called third world countries have better laws on the books for women -- of course women are crucial to this whole question of population -- have better laws on the books in terms of women's rights than some industrialized countries. And yet the women in these countries, apparently, from what we hear, do not have access to those laws, maybe don't know about them or can't implement them for whatever reason. And so I guess the question of empowerment sort of goes to the heart of this Conference and the overall issue of population and development. What does the Conference hope to achieve by way of helping women

learn more about their rights and then take advantage of their rights, and presumably therefore lower the population growth?

SINGH: Well, this Conference is a part of a process. It's very much concerned with the whole question of the empowerment of women, but all the issues concerning the empowerment of women are not going to be decided on this Conference alone.

ORVIS: Will any of them be?

SINGH: No, as I said, it's part of a process in the sense that that process which began some time ago -- and we can take any number of conferences that were held in the 1970s, you can take the World Population Conference, in Bucharest, but perhaps more importantly, the Women's Conference that took place in Mexico, and then other conferences and so on and other activities that have taken place -- have started a process through which a large number of countries have felt it necessary to begin to change their laws, and that's one of the steps. But changing the law itself is not enough of a guarantee that actual social and economic conditions change or that people have actually the opportunities that they deserve and are guaranteed in some ways by the law. And that is a longer process.

But I think that there is a movement in the right direction. But I take your point that in many developing countries, but perhaps also in many developed countries to a different degree, the equality between men and women has not been fully established. And we all have to continue making that effort. But changes in law, though important in itself, are not going to guarantee the real equality. Other steps -- in the field of education, in the field of employment, in the field of the changing of social mores -- are also necessary.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Singh, if you're ever going to resolve this problem, you have to begin with puberty. Yet there's a great deal of opposition, including in the United States, to sex education in the schools. Does the Population Fund have a policy for or against sex education in the schools?

SINGH: We have to take a position in the context of reality there, and the reality is, as I think you are suggesting, that in a lot of countries teenagers are in need of sex education, and, where necessary, also of services. And without taking any position in terms of whether it's good or bad, one has to recognize the reality as such of teenagers being in need of such information and services. And, as far as we are concerned, those services ought to be provided. Whether it's here or anywhere else, for that matter. And that's why, again coming back to the final document of the Conference, there is a special section dealing with adolescents, and it suggests that they be provided adequate information and, if they need, also services to protect themselves, to protect their

partners and, ultimately, to deal with the problem of their sexuality and health in a more constructive fashion.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Halfdan, whom I mentioned earlier, says that parents should not have the right of veto over whether their children should have access to contraceptives. Does your agency have a position on that?

SINGH: Well, I don't think the agency itself can take a position on that kind of a very, I would say, interesting issue, which somehow has to also relate to national conditions, both social, cultural and political. But in general, what I have earlier indicated should be the trend, that we should reach a point where, first of all, wherever necessary all teenagers be provided education in this area. And if it becomes a problem in the sense that it's clear that they need also services, that they need contraceptives and so on, that various kinds of legal objections should not stand in the way. But I couldn't say to you that that is necessarily an established, stated policy of the Fund. We have to go by the wishes of the governments in a variety of countries. But if they do want that kind of advice from international services, we will be happy to provide it to them.

NGUYEN: But the Conference is also looking for a huge amount of money in order to really help stabilize the population growth and the birthrates. By the year 2000, you are looking at something like $10 billion. I wonder, how optimistic are you to getting that amount of money, and where are you going to spend it?

SINGH: I don't think we're looking for that much money. Our requirements are very small. We are only looking for $4.4 billion by the year 2000 from international sources. We have suggested that, overall, $13.2 billion be spent on population activities, but two thirds of that will come from the developing countries themselves. Of the one third that we want from international sources, at the moment about one fourth is available; but if a number of major donors, starting with the United States, going on to Japan and many of the European and other countries, could increase their contribution, and if the number of banks, world banks and regional banks, would play a role, I think we can reach that goal.

NGUYEN: How much of this money will go into let's say condoms, into health education for adolescents, and on helping poor women, for example?

SINGH: Oh, I think a major part of it should go to help poor women, and perhaps also poor men in some cases. And that it should go towards providing the services to them that they require, including provision of contraceptives.

LITTLEJOHNS: Pat Orvis.

ORVIS: Yes, I'm still a bit suspicious of the idea of conferences and years and so on. And I'm wondering, what kind of people -- especially since the official

representation will be delegates from governments -- what kind of people come in these delegations? Are they people in this case that have the interests of women, let's say, at heart and, you know, of family and so on? Or are they people who perhaps view it as earning, as a sort of gift at the end of a long period of servicej? Or is it people who are recognized as authority figures, like the government officials and so on? Or will it be people who have women's and family interests at heart?

SINGH: I think there has been an interesting evolution in this area. You'll find for instance at this preparatory committee there are many delegations which are composed of not only civil servants but also politicians and the representatives of non-governmental organizations. So an attempt is being made by a large number of countries to reflect, even in their official delegations, the varieties of public opinion that exist in the country and the variety of services that are being provided by organizations in the field of family planning or in the improvement of the role and status of women. So when we get to the Conference, it's our hope that in fact the delegations will include not only government representatives, but also parliamentarians, NGOs, academics, and with some attempt at gender balance.

ORVIS: But just a quick follow-up. You pressed a button with these non-profit NGOs. In the past it's often been thought that the non-profit, the do-gooders if you will, the private aid-granting organizations might be the undoing of development, because rather than collaborating, let's say, in a ghetto somewhere in a third world country, they tend to compete for whatever funds are available and whatever problems are available. Do you see any evidence that they'll kind of all pull together in this Conference?

SINGH: We will move and try to work in that direction.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Singh, we only have a short time left, but the question has arisen of why you chose Cairo for this Conference. Cairo is known as a rather insecure city. There have been attacks on foreigners. If you have thousands of foreigners visiting the city, isn't that going to present a lot of problems?

SINGH: At the moment, I do not think that that's the case. The authorities in Egypt have shown us that the city is as safe as any other city of its size anywhere else in the world. And in a recent visit -- Dr. Sadik and I were in Cairo recently -- we were assured again that the government will provide adequate security. Prior to us, Senator Wirth was there, and he has said, on behalf of the United States, that he is satisfied with the arrangements there. So our impression at the moment is that there is not a big problem in this area. In fact there is no problem in this area, and we will have adequate security for the Conference in Cairo.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about representation? Is it going to be a summit conference, as they say?

SINGH: It is a ministerial level conference. We expect all the countries to be sending delegations with a minister at its head. But it's also an expectation that a number of heads of state or government will be there. Our current estimate is that between 10 and 12 heads of state and government will also participate in the Conference.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Singh, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Jyoti Shankar Singh, Executive Coordinator of the International Conference on Population and Development. He was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International and Pat Orvis of the *Christian Science Monitor*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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